

December 1996

Back Talk

Tony Ferguson
Columbia University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Tony (1996) "Back Talk," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 8: Iss. 6, Article 12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2175>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Accreditation Game from page 22

user-friendly manner and when Internet access is reliable. Recognition of the ease of use of electronic resources is growing and accreditors are increasingly sensitive to the large-scale financial commitment to these resources on the part of libraries. Accrediting teams also seem to be growing in sensitivity to libraries' need to conserve space and funds and they are not opposed to the notion of document delivery and fulltext online access to journals, provided that the access is user-friendly and reliable.

Conclusion

Regardless of the academic discipline under review, accreditation agencies consistently look for these components when evaluating departments: the range and depth of subjects offered; departmental lab facilities if appropriate; departmental and campus-wide computer and tutorial facilities; specialty areas, research, teaching, and service work among the teaching faculty; library facilities. Regarding specific library components, accreditors examine the overall range of library services, the accessibility of the library and its collections (including hours that the library is open and staffing levels), and relevancy and currency of library collections.

Bottom Line

The most important factor is for the entire campus to showcase itself as a unified, mutually informed whole when presenting its programs to the visiting accreditation teams. Evaluators cannot help but be impressed by high levels of cooperation and the library's true understanding of the knowl-

edge base for which the department under review is responsible. And, customized packaging of library resources shows a keen level of preparedness. A well-organized campus with a high degree of inter-departmental cooperation sends a positive message to visitors — as powerfully as the quality of the program itself. 🐼

Letter from Oklahoma from page 38

Naked Truth about Internet Culture, by Dinty W. Moore. The Internet book is actually from the backlist but you see by it the variety of titles that Algonquin carries, too, not just Southern fiction, although that would not be a bad line to get stuck in.

And as if this isn't enough to make the heart start pining for home, the husband of a second cousin has got me listening to WTOB (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) on the World Wide Web <<http://www.wtob.com>>.

Harold Birdsong is the advertising manager for WTOB and is interested in using the Internet to expand the audience and the advertising of his station. It features CNN news, North Carolina news, and several talk shows. The reception is clear and the local accents familiar. Tune in and give a listen. Tell them that Tom sent you (they have an email address for easy correspondence). Readers need news, too, and here is a great way to tune in without turning on.

Happy new year to each and every one of you gentle readers. 🐼

Back Talk from page 82

Ward Shaw announced that he is interested in finding some major research libraries which would be willing let him market access to their contents. This is only the beginning. Some will view this kind of cooperation as an anath-

ema to the goals of higher education, others will look upon it as the democratization of information access at last. I am in the latter camp. By the way, Ward isn't the devil but I thought it might cause you to read this last sound byte.

Cooperation is not dead. It lives in new clothes. 🐼

• Your new
• link
• to less
• work
• and
• lower cost



"An Internet - based electronic commerce enterprise"



Join our member mailing list



web
Subscribe

Library

Publisher

Letters

News

Calendar

About

RoweCom announces the release of *web Subscribe ...*

Download *Subscribe 3.1* update

<http://www.rowe.com/>

1-800-RoweCom

Back Talk

Holiday Madness: Library Cooperation in the Digital Future

by **Tony Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University)
Phone: 212-854-2270; Fax: 212-222-0331; <ferguson@columbia.edu>



Cooperation. I decided that I wanted to talk about this basic libraryspeak concept in "Back Talk" but I've had a difficult time settling on a catchy title. Let me begin by sharing with you some of the titles and topics that I began with:

- * Cooperation: An Unnatural Act.
- * Cooperation: A Library Limb Severed by the Bleeding Edge of Technology.
- * Cooperation: New Speed Limits Achieved on the Information Super Highway.
- * Cooperation and Castor Oil: Cures Worse Than the Ills?
- * Cooperation: A Marketing Scheme Made in Heaven.
- * Cooperating With the Devil: Selling Access to My Collection.

Armed with these half-dozen good titles, I began to roll the words, sentences and paragraphs around in my mind but decided that, rather than devote this space to any single issue, I would develop extended sound bytes for each in hopes of stimulating some dialogue or at least fulfilling my debt to Katina.

Cooperation: An Unnatural Act. The suggestion in this title is that we don't practice cooperation because it is unnatural. This, of course, flies in the face of reality. Today, almost anything unnatural is embraced whether it is body-piercing, tattooing, or spraying one's hair purple. It isn't that cooperation is unnatu-

ral; it is because cooperation requires an act of faith or trust: I'll share with you if you will share with me. We simply don't trust each other — a fear that if you allow unwashed infidels from other schools, cities, etc., into your library, your resources will be over utilized. Now to believe this, to me, requires the ultimate act of faith. Most research libraries suffer from a lack of use, not over use. Library use is the sign of success. We just need to figure out how to recover our costs.

Cooperation: A Library Limb Severed by the Bleeding Edge of Technology. Actually I need to talk about this and **Cooperation: New Speed Limits Achieved on the Information Super Highway** at the same time. There is evidence that cooperation is being discarded in our rush toward the legitimacy of the digital library. For example, at Columbia as part of getting ready for an external review we are reexamining what happened to all of the recommendations from earlier internal and external reviews. In 1983 the library was encouraged to work with other libraries to provide access to previously owned but subsequently canceled journals. While my initial reaction was to feel guilty that we were no longer active participants in the RLG Long and Short Term Serials projects and focusing our energies on building the digital library, it occurred to me that with the advent of commercial document delivery and easy access to a variety of online periodicals indexes and abstracts, the old-timey solution of dividing up the responsibility to subscribe to the world's less read journals may have passed.

Moreover, digital technology seems to have revitalized the borrowing of monographs. State and regional online catalogs with user-initiated borrowing is revolutionizing the field of interlibrary loans. Users, in every state where this is possible, are demonstrating that when they don't have to find the ILL office, or have to fill out stiff colored cards requesting books with interesting titles; they will ask for anything that someone else will lend. Now our biggest problem is getting out of their way. Too many of us pine for the day when we could talk them out of what they thought they wanted and into what we knew they needed.

Cooperation and Castor Oil: Cures Worse Than the Ills? Just in case I am becoming a bit too syrupy about the joys of technology and its positive impact on cooperation, I feel I must vent a bit about the time-consuming nature of cooperating in the digital age. In the good old days (yesterday, today, tomorrow), of building ink on paper collections, we used to jot our initials and fund code on a publisher's brochure or on the form stuck in every approval plan book and a selector's work of acquiring the item was finished. Periodicals in many

libraries required groveling in front of a committee but even that was fairly straight forward. Now, in the age of statewide and regional shared license agreements, selectors and administrators at every institution go through these documents themselves or with their lawyers in search of the fine print put there by publishers' lawyers designed to separate the libraries from their money and "fair use" rights. This process seems to go on interminably until each side finds something that will permit them to feel they have triumphed over their opponents. This of course glosses over all of the committee work that had to take place before the licensing could begin. All of this is a great waste of human energy, but since where there is no pain, there is no gain, we must move along cheerfully in our attempts to bring people and information together as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Cooperation: A Marketing Scheme Made in Heaven. Recently, I wondered if the publishers of the electronic encyclopedia or the electronic journal packages I have helped market in the Northeast Research Libraries (NERL) group will send me a W-2 form at the end of the year to recognize my efforts. Even if they overlook me this year, I hope they will give me free online access to their information services from the old folks home where my children will park me after I am retired.

So far, I have worked with librarians from about a dozen institutions in order to get them to sign on to the digital encyclopedia deal so that Columbia's costs will be reduced. This is a great marketing device that is taking place in the name of cooperation, and it is only beginning. Over the past year I have been attending meetings in New York with K-12, public library, public university, and private university librarians in order to get organized so that we can take advantage of our aggregated buying power. New York has 3.3 million elementary and secondary school students, 1.3 million higher education students, and another 15 million residents not enrolled in school. Our aggregated potential is enormous, but every new shared deal will take time and energy and will take librarians into new fields of endeavor.

Cooperating With the Devil: Selling Access to My Library Collection. Business is a form of cooperation. Merchants share their wares in exchange for our sharing our dollars. Commercial firms have recognized the value of our collections, but that we were unable to effectively display what we had, and deliver it quickly, once it was known. UnCover is a good example of how a business can facilitate the sharing of one library's resources with the patrons of another library — for a fee. Recently at the 1996 Charleston Conference

continued on page 78

The most experienced supplier of Italian publications to libraries throughout the world. Monthly bibliographical cards for all new books. Highly selective blanket orders to meet every library's special requirements. Standing orders for series and multi-volume monographs. Subscription to periodicals with direct, centralized mailing. Searching for out-of-print material. Library binding.

Casalini libri

50014 Fiesole (FI), Italy
Tel. (39-55) 599.941
Fax (39-55) 598.895